

WELLBEING GUIDE

for support
when your country
is facing a crisis



Your country

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As a student from a country that may be experiencing political unrest or a natural disaster, or perhaps you have family in a country facing difficulties, you may have varied thoughts and feelings some of which could be difficult to cope with. Understandably, when something terrible happens, our minds can race with anxious thoughts about our family, home, friends, and fears for the future. This leaflet is intended to provide useful hints, tips, and information about services and strategies that may be helpful.

Looking after yourself

- ✓ **OUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING IS VITAL** without health we cannot manage our studies or face the demands of everyday life. In a crisis, the demands on us increase and we need to take care of our health even more to meet those demands.
- ✓ **SHARING OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS** with someone else can help us process emotions. At other times, distraction from thoughts could be beneficial. It's important to meet up with friends and avoid being alone for extended periods of time.
- ✓ **ARE YOU DISTRACTED** by worrying about things you cannot control? It can be helpful to try to focus on what you can influence. Ask: "What can I do today – right here and now?". Perhaps make a phone call, send an email, go to the Library or a lecture. Self-compassion and acts of kindness can have a ripple effect benefiting not only us as individuals, but others and the world around us.
- ✓ **SLEEP** – Anxiety can cause difficulties sleeping, but a sleep routine is essential to health and wellbeing. For information on getting a good night's sleep, refer to our Sleeping Problems self help guide: selfhelpguides.nrw.nhs.uk/reading/leaflets/selfhelp/Sleeping%20Problems.pdf
Don't forget to rest during the day too, take time off regularly to ensure you are not exhausted later.
- ✓ **A NUTRITIOUS, BALANCED DIET** – You can lose your appetite when you have worries. It is important not to neglect your nutritional needs. including protein, fruit and vegetables and complex carbohydrates can build and sustain energy levels, look at healthy eating websites for easy-to-prepare recipes: nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/
- ✓ **EXERCISE** – It can also be hard to motivate yourself to do anything, you may feel guilty for enjoying your time. This is a natural response. Exercise stimulates endorphins which make our minds happier and less anxious; it makes our bodies fit and strong and increases our energy levels.

The news and social media

Of course, we want to know what's happening. But watching the news too often may increase anxiety, so it can be helpful to reduce your news intake to once in the morning and once in the evening. It's a good idea to listen to radio bulletins to avoid distressing media pictures and videos. You'll still get plenty of information without overload.

You might feel the need to check news feeds or scan social media constantly, but it can be draining and distracting when refreshing the screen brings no updates. Limiting social media use to twice a day for 10-15 minutes can help – you could set an alarm on your phone as a reminder to stop. Sometimes media reports can be incorrect, try to be clear on what is and is not true.

How to focus on studies whilst experiencing big worries

Concentration on and motivation for academic work can be difficult at a time like this but maintaining studies is very important for the future and focusing can also provide a comforting sense of control and achievement.

If you're distracted by 'to do' lists (like calling family members or replying to emails) try writing it down to free up head space. Also making a schedule – something visual like a wall planner or online monthly calendar for the term – enables us to see any approaching deadlines in good time and plan for any busy periods.

Be kind to yourself. Work within the concentration span, not against it – it's natural to find your concentration is reduced when concerned about major events and loved ones. It can be helpful to acknowledge this, setting smaller goals and shorter targets. Perhaps working for 15-minute blocks and having short breaks. Then, trying gradually to lengthen these blocks of time.

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It can be hard to think creatively during stressful times. If you're finding demanding tasks such as essay writing difficult, note down the more routine and repetitive tasks you could focus on when you're finding it hard to be creative. Mechanical and detailed tasks, like sorting reference lists, downloading all those journal articles, or learning key formulae, can occupy our minds and be a welcome relief.

You could also try some healthy distractions and mindful activities between lectures and study:

- ✓ Read an enjoyable book
- ✓ Colouring
- ✓ Playing board games
- ✓ Making/solving puzzles
- ✓ Take a walk in the Harris Gardens and enjoy the plants and daylight

What do you think will help you in this difficult time?
Use this space to make some notes

A large white rounded rectangular box with a soft drop shadow, intended for the user to write their notes in response to the prompt above.

Further help and support

- **International Student Advisory Team**
 - reading.ac.uk/essentials/International/international-student-advisory-team
- **ukcisa.org.uk**
 - Comprehensive information and resources website covering every aspect of international student life including visas, finance, other practicalities, and integration into life in the UK
- **Counselling and Wellbeing**
 - reading.ac.uk/essentials/support-and-wellbeing/counselling-and-wellbeing
- **Welfare**
 - reading.ac.uk/essentials/support-and-wellbeing/welfare